

Critical Analysis of the Left: Lets Clean House

Joaquin Cienfuegos

2009

Contents

Introduction	3
Political Careerism	3
Celebrity Culture	4
Self-Righteousness	5
Combating and Eliminating Liberalism Today	5
White Left Vanguard Parties	6
On Informal Hierarchies and Illegitimate Leadership	6
Academia	7
Movement VS. Scenes and Cliques	8
Conclusion	8

Introduction

In a recent conversation with a *compa*, we discussed the movement internationally and here within the Empire. We compared. Things are intensifying around the world due to many different factors, including fundamental contradictions of capitalism and indigenous people in particular and oppressed people as a whole own conscious struggles to be free. Here in the u.s. we have much work to do, and as my comrade I was talking to put it, "We have to clean house!"

I wanted to write this piece as a means to raise some discussion over some of the key problems with the Left today. We should always be critical and people should analyze things for themselves, always in the sense of where we are at and where we need to go so we don't become stagnant. This is just one particular analysis of the movement and Left today and how some forms of opportunism and liberalism manifest themselves. I want to be as honest as possible in terms of our collective experience, otherwise we will continue on and not really call things as they really are, therefore continuing to allow these things to happen. There are definitely too many phonies running around acting like they're down for the people but only looking out for their own interests and will be quick to snitch, betray, and sell you out. This is also to combat and to struggle against these behaviors, this is not an attempt to point the finger at anyone. We cannot blame the people for 500 years of colonialism; we have to attack the system, the real problem that we are facing that is killing us at this very moment.

We have to begin to take things more seriously, because our enemies are definitely serious. In Los Angeles they've already begun to lock individuals up or attempt to keep them busy fighting off their cases, bogging them down in their courts, jails and prisons. We definitely have a different situation here within this beast of u.s. imperialism, where we have an uphill battle to lay down the foundation for a popular movement with all the first world privilege and colonial mentalities. As capitalism continues to crumble we have to expect for capitalists to tighten their grip around our necks and the fascists will continue to attack our communities, colonies, and neo-colonies.

I think there are two things that are becoming more apparent in the Left today: 1) we are seeing clear lines being drawn (meaning we are seeing people's true colors come out), which is good in the sense that alliances are being made based on principled unity; and 2) we are seeing people who would rather attack and make enemies with other oppressed people or people in the movement than go after the real institutional enemies of the people in terms of the system as a whole. I think some of these things are necessary due to the times we are living in, but we definitely will have to deal with them. It is part of the process for revolution.

So in essence I put this out there for the purpose of raising dialogue and hoping to continue to make a reality the new world in our hearts.

Lets Clean House.

Identifying and combating problems in the movement today:

Political Careerism

I think, personally, one of the biggest forms of opportunism today is political careerism where people use the grassroots and larger movement to build their own networks for their own future political career in a sense. The most popular case of this is of course the Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who was a member of Casa, a Marxist-Leninist Chican@ organization. Now, Villaraigosa has single handedly attacked all poor people and people of color by hiring more police and funneling

more city funding to local law enforcement. As well as gentrifying oppressed communities displacing families, and pushing people into the streets and prisons.

We have to be careful of folks who intend on following the footsteps of people like Villaraigosa and are building for their future as a politician. These folks usually like to play all sides, have their hands in everything, and be known in every circle of activists, organizers, and even radicals because they want to use these networks for their careerist intentions. These people today will lie, fake smile, and bamboozle their way into a leadership position today. Many of them have one foot in the movement today and the other they have inside the establishment and its institutions, in other words they already have a relationship with the state. Sometimes with the police, district attorneys, and many local politicians, to have their foot in the door already.

Another form of this opportunism we can see inside the Non-Profit Industrial Complex where many political careerists hope to build up their networks and hold leadership positions already. There are also just many who use the movement for the benefit of their own career in general. Non-profits, however, have hired many people of color who in other sectors of work would not have a job, but looking at the role that the Non-Profit Industrial Complex plays in guiding the struggle in a direction that is not a threat to the state because their funding in large comes from the state itself. We have many recent examples where these people have not been honest to the communities they “serve” in terms of their real relationship they have to the state apparatus, and in many key times of repression they have sold out the more radical segments of the movement.

Celebrity Culture

Another way some use the movement, is to promote themselves, build themselves up as an activist celebrity, build their own “legacy,” and many times it is because they also want to get paid. This society is ingrained in a celebrity culture where they put up people on a pedestal if they’re “famous” and every facet of their personal life gets revealed to the world. The movement does not exist in a vacuum so therefore it is going to be affected and influenced by the larger society. So people will look to build up these activist/anarchist/and movement celebrities themselves. This is part of the social conditioning and colonialism of building up personalities and not empowering individuals to realize their own potentials as revolutionaries and as human beings. This is not to say we shouldn’t celebrate our revolutionaries, our victories, our communities and individuals who have made that “revolutionary sacrifice,” what I’m being critical of something completely different.

What I am discussing is not the individuals but the culture in general; that is what we have to struggle against. We cannot blame the people for being colonized and conditioned a certain way. There are those however that wish to get paid. That is okay as long as some of that is getting back to the oppressed communities and the revolutionary movement. The real issue is the liberals, who have no other way to build a legacy or are good at anything else so therefore they seek to do that for themselves in the movement. So what we have instead of a real movement is these folks taking the struggle in a direction of personality cults in a sense and we lose sight of the people who are the real makers of history always. The people are smart though, and they can tell who is real and who is fake, and they’ll ride with the ones who will have their backs. They can tell when they are being used. I have trust in them to know what is in their interests and that they will learn through their collective experience.

Self-Righteousness

Self-Righteous behavior is too common in the activist circles today where they divorce themselves from the oppressed communities because the activists see themselves as better. This is an elitism, that comes from being separate from the oppressed communities, where activists see themselves as above “the people,” because they see that they have the correct language, the correct internal behavior and practice.

All oppressed people have been socialized and colonized under this White-Supremacist-Patriarchal-Heterosexist-Capitalist-Imperialist system, so even the activists are going to carry some baggage from the system even though they say otherwise. We have to understand that we are living in unhealthy conditions and these conditions are brought with us into the movement. The difference is where someone is constantly dealing with these unhealthy behaviors, accepting constructive criticism, and challenging themselves. There are some who do not wish to change or are not doing so at this moment, and we have to figure out how to deal with them if they come from our communities as well. So this is where we have to work with our people where they’re at not where we want them to be, otherwise we will be isolated from those we really have to reach right now.

This on the other hand does not mean we allow oppressive behavior to happen in our organizations and in our communities. We should try to build safe spaces, where all oppressed have collective ownership, are autonomous, and the state is not welcomed. These do not happen just in theory or just in our own activist circles, the community has to be brought into this process as well. It’s a matter of how we work with people when we know they will make mistakes. Does it mean we push them away when they make mistakes or say something wrong (this also depends if they’re willing to work on themselves or not)? No one is exempt from criticism and from continuous growth, not even revolutionaries.

Combating and Eliminating Liberalism Today

It was in 1937 when communists in China wrote about “Combating Liberalism,” and all of us, including anarchists, can learn from the writings to identify liberal behavior and consciously struggle against it. The difference, however, is how we would approach it in a horizontalist way, not in a hierarchical, vanguard partyist way.

Liberalism, Mao Tse-Tung wrote in “Combating Liberalism,” “stands for unprincipled peace...to let things slide for the sake of peace and friendship when a person has clearly gone wrong...to say nothing to people to their faces but to gossip behind their backs...to say as little as possible while knowing perfectly well what is wrong.”

This is all still relevant today where the behavior I hate the most is when people try to act like they are neutral when something wrong has happened. It could have been someone giving up information to the state, or someone creating divisions in an organization, and people saying that they’re neutral because it is a personal matter. The personal is political in a sense, but we cannot be neutral when the system is waging war on us. These also manifests itself today in people not calling out oppressive behavior when it happens and not challenging opportunists when they come into our communities and try to use us.

The difference though is the approach. Do we just do a Stalinist purge of people who are liberal (well this also depends if they are agents of the state or not), or do we engage in some dialogue over

this behavior in our organizations. I am not part of a party and do not agree with the vanguard party model, so we do not have or need a chairman to tell us how to deal with our problems. We need to figure out for ourselves how we can work with each other, and challenge each other out of love to help each other grow.

White Left Vanguard Parties

In my opinion, the White-Left Vanguard Party is becoming more and more insignificant today, because of the non-profit industrial complex and working class people of color's self-organization, but the behavior of the White-Left Vanguard Party still exists today and we should challenge it. What I mean by the White-Left Vanguard Party is the white-left organization who survived the 60's (after the truly revolutionary organizations were defeated) or is new, and think that they need to lead the struggle and impose themselves on oppressed communities and communities of color.

This behavior also comes from socialization of the white-settler who feels entitled to lead in the struggle because they are trained, giving the skills and resources to lead in society as a whole. So they have the white savior complex and feel that they need to speak for the oppressed. This does not just exist in the authoritarian left but also within the anarchist circles. This is something that is prevalent in all of the white left, and we should rely on other white leftists to challenge. Oppressed people however, should never allow them to come into our communities and impose their programs on us where they see only other whites being fit to lead us.

There are also Marxist-Leninist organizations made up of oppressed nations who follow a similar model but believe in the self-determination of the oppressed. I personally have taken a different approach towards them because I believe that people have to figure things out for themselves sometimes. This does not mean we as anti-authoritarians don't organize. We should insert ourselves in our own communities and build the autonomous people's councils and the foundation of a popular movement. Some of these organizations will take part of the popular movement and are part of our communities. Many times we will need to enter into strategic alliances with them.

We need to be organizing under our principles and popularizing our ideas. The people will decide and know what is in their best interests in the long run. In the Third World today people are organizing more in a horizontalist and autonomous ways in the communities because the state is not providing for them and they build up the mutual-aid relationships out of their need for survival. Many have found out this way of building is the only way to build something fundamentally new.

On Informal Hierarchies and Illegitimate Leadership

To me the overall question of leadership is one that comes down to collective responsibility and revolutionaries taking initiative. There is however, in my opinion, legitimate and illegitimate leadership.

Legitimate leadership is revolutionaries organizing and taking the initiative to build up the collective ownership of the community, redistribute resources, and building the organization of the people. It is revolutionary individuals and collectives organizing to where there is no difference between them and the rest of the community, because they are one in the same.

The illegitimate leadership today can manifest itself in many ways: the people who do no work but want all the credit, sideline haters (who basically criticize from the sidelines of the movement

but are not willing to fight with the people or who intend to make poster children out of the youth and let them catch all the heat from the state and will not defend them), opportunists, people who wish to co-opt the movement or organizations that they had nothing to do in building (a form of opportunism), and of course the state and organizations with deep ties to the state. The Non-Profit Industrial Complex now represents a form of illegitimate leadership in our communities and do many of the things mentioned. Many of them have also deep ties to the state but act as the representatives for our communities.

We should not allow this to happen anymore; we shouldn't give them any power.

Academia

I will first like to start to explain the role of academia in society. For many oppressed people what we get told is the only way, "we can make it out or make it" is to go to school and graduate from college, that for us this is the only legitimate form of struggle is in their universities. The university, however, is a bourgeois/capitalist institution. A lot of the research that comes from it feeds the war machine, so how can this be a revolutionary institution? It is not. Its role is to act as training for the people who will become the new middle class and upper middle class, fundamentally this is the role of the university.

Throughout time the oppressed have fought and students have waged important struggles in history. They've made many gains (that are now being taken away) including Ethnic Studies programs, where people can learn about their history, culture, and to think critically, of course in a way that is not threatening to the state (even though many professors connected to the community and revolutionary organizations have slipped through and teach what is needed to be taught in these schools). After many students graduate from universities the only jobs that are available to them for the most part is in the Non-Profit Sector, which also promotes the idea that the ones with a university education are the best qualified to lead. I do think that if our people decide to attend a university they should come back into their communities and democratize their knowledge. This is a view also promoted by Chicano organizer and revolutionary Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in a speech given to students decades ago. They shouldn't come back and expect a leadership position however, just because they attended a university. They should work with the community and stand side by side with other organizers already there.

Also Academia and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex have attempted to hijack the revolution, take credit for, change the language, and again be the "legitimate" forms to struggle. Academia takes folks away from their communities if they're people of color and oppressed. They attempt to define the struggle for the people from the ivory tower and they have a monopoly on book knowledge inaccessible to the majority of society.

Looking at the education model within academia where you have an expert on a subject talk to you for hours and you are expected to regurgitate what they tell you in a test or essay. Do people really learn this way? We need to look at forms of popular education. Just because you are not a professor does not mean you do not have things to teach, based on your experiences. You probably have many things to teach your professors; there is a lot of value in your life experiences and they are valid.

Note: There are many people inside academia challenging it from the inside, who support the community struggles.

Movement VS. Scenes and Cliques

This should come without saying that what we need to build is a movement, not a scene. In the anarchist circles today we have to be honest with ourselves and others. We cannot call what we have a movement. We have to be relevant to the most oppressed and our communities. We cannot build organizations and events just for us but where non-activists feel that they can relate to and think is interesting. I think in Los Angeles we are attempting to do this and we are conscious of this at anarchist events and gatherings. There are always topics covered on all local struggles people can connect to.

We need a movement, we do not need a scene or activist cliques. Social gatherings are important but we need to go beyond the activist scene.

Conclusion

We need Revolution, the sooner begun, the sooner done!

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Joaquin Cienfuegos
Critical Analysis of the Left: Lets Clean House
2009

Retrieved on September 8, 2009 from joaquincienfuegos.blogspot.com

theanarchistlibrary.org